

# Secret 'COVID-19 Manhattan Project' Led by Billionaires Seeking to Influence Trump Admin

By [Zero Hedge](#)

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*Last month Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey called for the bold and urgent launch of [what he called](#) "a Manhattan Project-type approach" to fight the coronavirus pandemic given the enormity of the health and economic impact, increasingly even harming US [defense readiness](#).*

Apparently there has been such a group operating behind the scenes, but very unlike the original Manhattan Project it's a private sector initiative, funded by a tiny network of ultra-rich industry titans working closely with government contacts. Meet "the secret group of scientists and billionaires pushing Trump on a Covid-19 plan" profiled in a lengthy [Wall Street Journal investigation Monday](#):

These scientists and their backers describe their work as a lockdown-era Manhattan Project, a nod to the World War II group of scientists who helped develop the atomic bomb. This time around, the scientists are marshaling brains and money to distill unorthodox ideas gleaned from around the globe.

They call themselves Scientists to Stop Covid-19, and they include chemical biologists, an immunobiologist, a neurobiologist, a chronobiologist, an oncologist, a gastroenterologist, an epidemiologist and a nuclear scientist. Of the scientists at the center of the project, biologist Michael Rosbash, a 2017 Nobel Prize winner, said, "There's no question that I'm the least qualified."

The until now secretive group is led by a 33-year-old physician-turned-venture capitalist, Tom Cahill, and is described as an elite go-between the pharmaceutical industry and Trump administration decision-makers, or an "ad hoc review board" of sorts pursuing cutting edge outside the box ideas.

The scientists include a dozen world renowned researchers, pathology experts and inventors closely networked at institutions ranging from The Scripps Research Lab in La Jolla, California, to Yale University School of Medicine to Harvard to MIT's Laboratory for Nuclear Security and Policy to private companies and labs like Merck and others.

Recommendations and ideas floated by *Scientists to Stop Covid-19* have already reportedly had far-reaching influence, including affecting policy inside FDA and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the group is reportedly advising close Pence aide Nick Ayers.

Among other billionaire influencers and backers to the private initiative include Peter Thiel, Jim Palotta, Michael Milken, Brian Sheth, and Steve Pagliuca, among others.

I was reading this thinking: There's no way Peter Thiel isn't involved in this and then . . . yup. <https://t.co/anj1BJCBUz>

— Elliot Kaufman (@ElliotSKaufman) [April 27, 2020](#)

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As an example of how the group was previously able to get a confidential 17-page report (since published by the WSJ) recommending various introductory unorthodox approaches to fighting and treating the pandemic, the [WSJ details](#):

“Steve Pagliuca, co-owner of the Boston Celtics and the co-chairman of Bain Capital — as well as one of Dr. Cahill's investors — helped copy edit drafts of their report, and he passed a version to Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Chief Executive David Solomon. Mr. Solomon got it to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.”

“Much of the early work involved divvying up hundreds of scientific papers on the crisis from around the world,” the report describes of the team's daily communications.

“They separated promising ideas from dubious ones. Each member blazed through as many as 20 papers a day, around 10 times the pace they would in their day jobs. They gathered to debate via videoconference, text messages — ‘like a bunch of teenagers,’ Mr. Rosbash said — and phone calls.”

Among the ‘big ideas’ described by the network of researchers led by scientist-investor Dr. Cahill, who first gained the attention of aides within the Trump administration when they listened on an early March conference call tailored toward answering investors' questions,

include the following:

- Experimenting with treatments utilizing powerful anti-Ebola drugs in heavier dosages.
- The possibility of renaming the virus “SARS-2,” after the 2003 China animal virus, so that the connection is better made in the public mind with a deadly disease: *“the name sounded scarier and might get more people to wear face masks. They dropped it.”*
- The group considers Hydroxychloroquine, long a focus of interest and debate in Trump administration circles, to be “a long shot at best”.
- The team has looked negatively on recent efforts to push antibody testing and ‘immunity passports’ that show recovery from the virus.
- They’ve sought to reduce FDA hurdles and red tape in order to get potential successful drugs out faster, especially to streamline hoped-for ‘miracle’ cures.
- The WSJ emphasizes further: “The scientists had in their research identified monoclonal antibody drugs that latch onto virus cells as the most promising treatment.”
- A saliva test which is easy to administer with ultra-fast results is being pursued, one that offices and companies could utilize to make sure employees come into work virus-free each day.
- Tech like smartphone apps to help track and gauge symptoms is a major focus.
- The scientists are also helping to craft state and national reopening strategies for the near and long-term.

# SCIENTISTS TO STOP COVID-19

March and April 2020

We are a group of passionate citizen-scientists who offer four actionable, non-partisan proposals to produce safe and effective COVID-19 therapeutics and vaccines in the shortest possible timeframe, and to reopen our society in a manner that reduces the risk of future COVID-19 outbreaks. None of the contributors named in this proposal have any direct or known indirect financial interests in the referenced companies. Our only motivation is to help defeat the serious threat our nation and the world now faces.

The war against COVID-19 is being fought on multiple fronts: by our heroic healthcare workers on the front lines; by talented scientists in the laboratories of corporations and research institutions; by governments at the federal, state, and local levels; and by other citizens sacrificing their freedoms to limit the spread of the pandemic. Here we describe plans to develop therapeutics and vaccines, and to reopen our businesses and schools, that could be deployed in several waves.

We envision a **first wave of therapies using existing drugs** that will establish a beachhead in the fight against the virus (*testing in April-May 2020, use immediately afterwards*). A **second wave of potent new antibody drugs** developed specifically to neutralize COVID-19 offer a promising combination of speed, safety, and likelihood of being effective (*testing in June-August 2020, use afterwards*). A **third wave of vaccines for long-term victory over the virus** will offer seasonal or multi-year immunity to COVID-19 (*testing in March 2020-March 2021, use afterwards*). In parallel, **reopening of businesses and schools to restore our society and economy** (*implementation in May-June 2020, lasting until the threat has passed*) will use science-driven symptom reporting, virus testing, and personal protective gear to minimize future COVID-19 outbreaks and additional loss of life.

The four proposals that follow describe: (1) How to rapidly repurpose an antiviral drug to treat COVID-19 patients; (2) How to expedite the development of human antibody drugs to treat patients and to provide short-term protection for healthy individuals; (3) How to develop COVID-19 vaccines on an expedited time scale; and (4) How to reopen our businesses and schools in a manner that reduces the risk of future outbreaks and deaths.

**It is critical that approaches to drugs, vaccines, and reopening our society be pursued and supported simultaneously.** To defeat this novel coronavirus in the United States, and around the world, will require a massive and well-organized collaborative effort from government, industry, philanthropy, and citizens. It is vital that we establish these partnerships and take actions immediately.

We hope these proposals will be considered with the seriousness and speed required by the current circumstances.

Sincerely yours,

Scientists to Stop COVID-19

Read a copy of the [17-page report drafted by the Scientists to Stop COVID-19 here](#).

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Featured image: Brian Sheth, co-founder of Vista Equity Partners (Photo via Bloomberg/WSJ)

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